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LINES OF DISTINCTION - HOW PROXIMITY SHAPES INDIVIDUAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS SOCIAL BENEFITS.

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Why do some social benefits enjoy continuous and high support while other does not? Why is there a high and continuous support for spending on state pensions, while there is a widespread resistance to spending on social assistance? The literature on individual welfare attitudes offers three overall micro level explanations of this. One possible explanation is that attitudes are based calculations self-interest, that is, personal gains from the social benefits. Another explanation is that attitudes are rooted in norms of social justice, either created by deep rooted values or by deservingness cues. Finally, a third explanation describes how attitudes are shaped by feedback from policies. These explanations are explored using data on attitudes towards five social benefits in Denmark. The unique feature of the data is that it contains detailed self-reported usage and proximity to the social benefits, enabling the paper to go into further details on this, than previous studies. Furthermore, the interplay between being proximate to social benefit and the perceived deservingness of the target groups is theorized and tested. The hypothesis is that for social benefits in which the group of recipients is perceived as undeserving, the effect of being proximate is bigger.

Keywords: Social benefits, policy level, attitudes, welfare, social justice, self-interest, policy feedback, proximity, deservingness.

Support for the welfare state can be measured on a number of levels. Kumlin (2007) distinguishes between general welfare attitudes, policy level welfare attitudes, and attitudes related to the performance of the welfare institutions. Studies of the general welfare attitudes paint a picture of consistent and high support for the welfare states in the Western countries, with attitudes mainly being a matter of left-right attitudes towards state intervention (Kumlin 2010; Roosma, Gelissen, and van Oorschot 2012; Svallfors 2007; 2012; Van Oorschot and Meuleman 2012). Going a level deeper, attitudes towards specific welfare state policies seem to be much more diverse and do not show the same pattern of clear cut support (Kumlin 2007). Some policies have large and consistent support in the public, measured as the willingness to spend further on them, whereas other encounters much more resistance. One example of this, from a Danish context, is the state pension, which since 1985 have had overwhelming support for more spending, while social assistance have had support for less spending throughout most of the same period (Stubager, Holm, and Smidstrup 2011). This paper studies attitudes towards social benefits and asks the question, what motivates individual to support more or less spending on a specific social policy?

Reviews of the literature on welfare attitudes suggest three overall individual level theoretical explanations: self-interest, social-justice, and policy feedback (Kumlin 2007; Svallfors 2010). Kumlin (2010) argues that all three theories might be valid in explaining attitudes, but citing Ullrich (2000), he also suggests that "(…) *we are largely lacking studies that explicitly test competing explanations for differences in support across policies.*" (Kumlin, 2007, 366). Furthermore, according to Svallfors (2010), the interplay between the theoretical explanations is still unclear: "*There seems to be a broad agreement that both norms and interest are affected by institutional arrangements and policy feedbacks, but at the present there is no consensus or even*

clear conception on how they work as mechanisms in creating attitudes towards welfare policies." (Svallfors 2010, 250). The aim of this article is to explore the theories at a policy level and specify interplay between policy feedback from proximity and the social justice perceptions created by deservingness heuristics. However, before this interaction is theoretically developed, a review of theories and studies on welfare attitudes is presented.

SELF-INTEREST

The theoretical explanation offered by self-interest draws on economic and rational choice theory to formulate what guides individual welfare attitudes. In the narrowest definition of this theoretical explanation attitudes towards social benefits are guided self-interest, defined as personal short-term material interests (Kumlin 2007; Taber 2003). According to Hasenfeld and Rafferty (1989) this shapes attitudes though a process where: "(…) *people adopt social ideologies that best explain and are most congruent with their life experiences*." (Hasenfeld and Rafferty 1989, 1031). Thus, in this explanation attitudes are exogenously created by short-term material interest. Studies of self-interest do, however, tend to use wider definitions which also factor in the influence of potential gains or indirect gains (as in e.g. Cusack, Iversen, and Rehm 2006; Iversen and Soskice 2001).

However, the results of studies drawing on the self-interest explanation have generally been poor: "*Short-term, material self-interest, it turns out in study after study, has remarkably little to do with public opinion on a wide range of political issues*." (Taber 2003, 447). This also holds true for welfare for welfare attitudes (Kumlin 2007), where some studies find a limited effect from self-interest (e.g. Blekesaune and Quadagno 2003; Cusack, Iversen, and Rehm 2006;

Kumlin 2002), while other find very little or no effect (e.g. Goul Andersen 2005; Svallfors 2012; Van Oorschot and Meuleman 2012).

One possible reason that the self-interest explanation has produced so poor results is that welfare attitudes are often measured at a general level. According to Kumlin (2007) there is no natural connection between receiving a single benefit and attitude change on abstract and ideologically-laden issues like the role of government and redistribution. Along the same lines Goul Andersen (2005) argues, that for most citizens the losses and gains from interactions with the welfare state is simply impossible to calculate. Therefore, if searching for a self-interest effect, it is more likely to find it at a policy level, where the connection between more spending and person gains is much more direct (Kumlin 2007). A second issue raised in reviews of the literature is that many studies rely on poor proxies of the usage of social benefits. Instead of the direct usage of a social benefit, many studies rely on more overall measurements like personal income, employment status, or risk exposure (Kumlin 2007; Svallfors 2012). This furthermore reduces the chances of finding an effect of self-interest.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

The second theoretical explanation, inspired by the sociological tradition, asserts that attitudes towards social benefits are guided by norms of what is socially just. The theoretical basis for these norms can either be described as a system of values or as being guided by deservingness heuristics (Kumlin 2007).

In the first explanation, social justice norms are guided by a system of internally cohesive values, which help determine attitudes towards societal issues (Feldman 2003). A number of labels have

been used to describe these opposing value systems, e.g. achievement and equality (Lipset 1963) or left-right orientations (Knutsen 1995), which guides attitudes towards societal issues such as the welfare state, the role of government or social benefits (Feldman and Zaller 1992; See also Feldman 2003 for critiques of this approach). This description of welfare attitudes fits well with Roosma et al. (2012) showing that in North and Western Europe the multiple dimensions of welfare attitudes can be reduced to a "(…) general welfare attitude that is fundamentally positive or negative." (Roosma, Gelissen, and van Oorschot 2012, 16).

The social justice norms are commonly measured using ideology as a proxy for values, i.e. voting patterns or self-placement of a left-right scale (e.g. Goul Andersen 2005; Jæger 2006; Kaltenthaler and Ceccoli 2008; Kangas 1997; Lipsmeyer and Nordstrom 2003; Valdimarsdóttir 2010; Van Oorschot 2002). This is based on the idea that individuals who express left wing attitudes want more government intervention, whereas right wing attitudes express a desire for more individual responsibility (Feldman and Zaller 1992; Feldman and Steenbergen 2001; Kumlin 2007). Even though this is a common way of measuring norms of social justice it entails issues of causality and endogeneity, as pointed out by Jæger (2008). The causality problems stems from the fact that most studies of welfare attitudes rely on cross-sectional data, since panel data is rare. The problem is that interactions with the welfare state can change political attitudes, as shown by Kumlin (2006). This, combined with the lack of a time dimension, makes it impossible to deduce the direction of causality. This can, furthermore, lead to endogeneity problems since the causal relationship between ideology and welfare attitudes is not clear and they might even be linked to a third unknown variable (Jæger 2008).

The other theoretical explanation of social justice norms are deservingness heuristics, a term for the mental shortcuts that individuals use to judge if recipients are deserving of their benefits. A

number of scholars have advanced the use of deservingness heuristics in relation to welfare attitudes (e.g. Larsen 2006; 2008; Petersen et al. 2011; Van Oorschot 2000; 2006). Especially van Oorschots (2000) study of why some groups of recipients is deemed more deserving than other is interesting in relation to answering the question posed by this paper. Based on a review of literature on welfare states and deservingness (Cook 1979; De Swaan 1988; Feagin 1972; Feather 1974; Will 1993) van Oorschot deduces and tests five criteria of deservingness (control, need, identity, attitude, reciprocity) that guide if groups of recipients are perceived to be deserving. This results in a ranking, which is consistent across Europe (Van Oorschot 2006), where the elderly are perceived as the most deserving, followed by the sick and disabled people, while the unemployed and especially immigrants are perceived as undeserving. For social benefits the deservingness of the target groups can thus explain the different patterns of support.

POLICY FEEDBACK

Policy feedback theory, inspired by historical intuitionalist theory, describes attitude formation in terms of a feedback process between policies and citizens. The idea of a feedback process between policies and the general public is present in many studies (Mettler and Soss 2004), but the argument was first systematically presented by Pierson (1993). Pierson describes how policy feedback can be created by two different processes, path dependency and policy learning. The idea presented in the path dependency argument is that citizens act rationally when faced with the incentives structures, like those created by government institutions: "*Individuals make important commitments in response to certain types of government action. These commitments, in turn, may vastly increase the disruption caused by new policies, effectively 'locking in' previous decisions*" (Pierson 1993, 608). This results in citizens having more positive attitudes

towards spending on social benefits that they directly or potentially gain from. The argument put forward by policy learning is that the existence of an institution affects norms of what is fair and just by affecting what is normal. This process is here summed up by Svallfors (2003) "*Institutions provide "normalcy", that is, they suggest to people what is "the normal state of affairs", and what is deviant or even impermissible.*" (Svallfors 2003, 172). For the social benefits this means that they become normalized and perceived as socially just.

Expanding on this overall framework of policy feedback, other studies have begun investigating and specifying this effect in various ways (Mettler and Soss 2004). A number of studies have shown how the design of a policy affects attitudes, e.g. universally awarded benefits have bigger support than for selective benefits, since a bigger part of the population can potentially gain from them, and contributory schemes also have bigger overall support than selective schemes, since they create feeling of entitlement and fewer opportunities for cheating (Campbell 2003; 2011; Svallfors 2012; Van Oorschot 2006).

Other studies have gone further into detail in exploring how personal experiences with welfare institutions affects attitudes. One example of this is Kumlin and Rothstein (2005) who show that interaction with universal welfare institutions tend to create social capital, while selective welfare institutions tend to create the reverse effect. Another prominent example is Kumlin (2002), who demonstrate how welfare state experiences are able to affect social trust and attitudes towards the welfare state. Svallfors (2006; 2007) argue that the welfare state institutions create a normative feedback, affecting the attitudes about what is the desirable role of government. Hedegaard and Larsen (2013) show how public service production created policy

feedback not only to the users of the services, but also to their families. Overall, the studies indicate proximity to the welfare state institutions create more positive attitudes towards them.

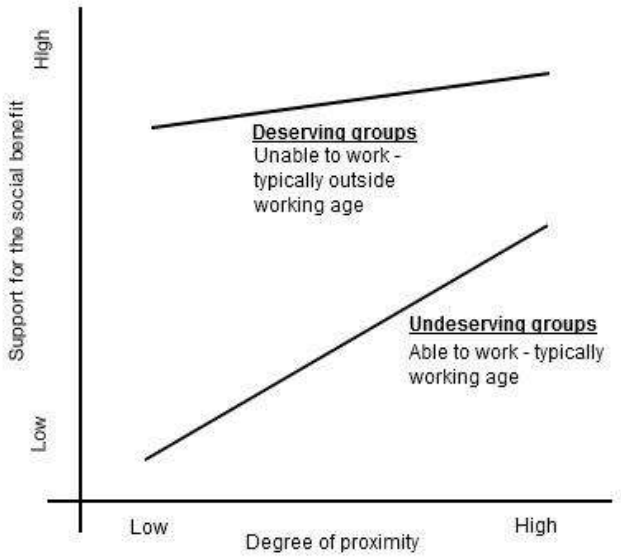
TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED THEORY

The theories outlined above gives us three overall explanations of individual welfare attitudes. However, it is also conceivable that interplay between the explanations theories exist. More specifically I will theorize on the possible interplay between policy feedback and social justice. This is done by exploring how policy feedback from proximity interacts with the overall assessments of the policies, created by deservingness heuristics.

I will start by reexamining van Oorschots (2000) identity criteria, as a way to connect the feedback from proximity to the deservingness heuristics. In the creation of his identity criteria, van Oorschot (2000) draws the line of distinction at ethnic minorities, asylum seekers, and illegal foreigners. However, the literature which he bases the identification criteria on (Cook 1979; De Swaan 1988) suggest closer distinctions could be made. De Swaan (1988) lists three criteria for judging if the poor are perceived as deserving, of which the proximity criteria has inspired van Oorschots (2000) identity criteria. In de Swaans (1988) definition of proximity several levels of distinctions are made, such as the family, town, church, or the people. Similarly Cook (1979) describes the identification as a matter of "them and us", which could be interpreted in additional and closer line of distinction. Thus, it is possible to imagine individuals operating with several levels of distinction or identification, as described by de Swaan (1995): "*Yet, social identifications, no matter how intensely held, are essentially multiple and unstable. For most individual they encompass the family and the village, the peer group and the neighborhood, the*

larger entities of class and nation (…)". (De Swaan 1995, 34-35). It is also likely that these levels might affect attitudes differently, depending on the proximity to the individual, with higher degrees of proximity resulting in more positive attitudes. This fits with other findings in the policy feedback literature, which show more positive attitudes among users of public services and benefits (e.g. Hedegaard and Larsen 2013; Kumlin 2002; Muuri 2010). In this study five social benefits are covered, which range broadly in terms of target group of the recipients (described in details in the next section). The hypothesis is that effect of proximity on attitudes towards the benefit varies depending on the public perception of the group receiving it. This process is described by Staerklé, Likki, and Scheidegger (2012) as an individual process of drawing distinctions or defining boundaries on the basis of deservingness: "*Though differentiation, individuals subjectively define boundaries between social groups, in particular boundaries between positively connoted, deserving social categories and negatively connoted, undeserving categories*." (Staerklé, Likki, and Scheidegger 2012, 86). For social benefits, in which the group receiving it is publicly perceived as being not deserving, the effect of proximity should be strong. This is due to the policy learning from being proximate to the social benefit "normalizing" or crowding out the negative public perceptions and replacing them with personal experiences and possibly sympathy for the recipients. For social benefits, in which the target group publicly is deemed to be deserving there is also a "normalizing" effect, but since the starting point is more positive the effect of proximity should be weaker. The expected interaction is presented in figure 1.

Figure 1: The possible interaction between of policy feedback from proximity and social justice norms created by deservingness heuristics



The question of deservingness can be reduced to a matter of whether the group of recipients is in control of their situation, i.e. are they able to work. Research based on the deservingness heuristics shows that perception of unwillingness to work among able groups creates large differences in whether groups (Van Oorschot 2000) or individual (Petersen 2011) are deemed as deserving. Petersen (2011) explains this as an evolved emphasis on reciprocity, which is at the basis of all welfare institutions. Groups or individual who are able to work, but does not, are deemed as undeserving, since they do not precipitate the welfare given to them. On the other hand groups who are not able to work are deemed deserving. The simplest heuristic to judge the target group is whether they are in the working age or not.

DATA, VARIABLES, AND METHOD

In the previous section problems regarding both the dependent and independent variables was raised. How these problems are handled in this study will be described in this section.

The source of the data used in this paper is a web panel collected by Analyse Danmark. The data was collected between the 23th and 27th of January 2012 and contains 1134 respondents. To overcome the problems outlined above this study uses a dependent variable that measures attitudes at a policy level. The dependent variable in this study is: "*Based on your knowledge of social benefits, do you think that the following benefits are too generous, suitable, or too low?*". Using a policy level measure of attitudes it is possible to reduce the problem pointed out by Jæger (2008) of explaining one set of abstract political values (attitudes towards the welfare state), with another set of abstract political values (ideology). On the other hand it limits who comparable the results are, both to other institutional settings and across time, since the social benefits have been the subject of a considerable number of reforms.

The study also contains questions on the self-reported proximity to the five social benefits. This gives the study an independent variable that measures the effect of being proximate to a social benefit, but also an alternative to personal income when trying to determine the effect of self-interest. The proximity to the social benefits is separated into four categories, which have been named orders of proximity. The 1.order of proximity contains the group who is presently, or within the last 12 months have been, recipients of the benefit. This opens for the opportunity of testing the effect of being a user, or having the experience in fresh memory, but also a measure of direct self-interest. The 2.order of proximity contains respondents who are related to recipients of the benefit, i.e. spouse/cohabitant, parents, children, or siblings. Having a recipient within the close family should create strong feelings of sympathy, but it also corresponds with the broader

definitions of self-interest which take indirect gains in to account. The 3.order of proximity contains the respondents who have recipients of the benefit within the closest circle of friends. This goes beyond even broad definitions of self-interest and only tests the effect of feedback from proximity. Finally the study also contains a reference category of the respondent that has no close relations to a recipient of the benefit, which is listed as 4.order proximity.

The proximity variable has been structured such that the respondents who answered that had 1.order proximity do not count in the other categories, and similarly for 2.order and 3.order. Persons who answered "down know" have been placed in the 4.order category. This "downwards deletion method" is put in place to make sure the answers of one person were not recorded in more than on category, based on an idea that it is the closest circle of distinction that is importance for the attitudes.

The survey also contains a number of background variables, of which personal income and which party they voted for in the last election, held on September 15th 2011, have been used as proxies for respectively self-interest and social justice values.

The five social benefits covered in the survey are: social assistance (SA), unemployment benefits (UB), incapacity benefits (IB), the state education grant (SEG), and state pension (SP). The first two benefits, social assistance and unemployment benefits, are both linked to unemployment, but are quite different in their designs. The social assistance scheme is available to all citizens, but contains strict and continuous means and eligibility testing and recipients of the benefit are also not allowed to have personal assets above 10.000 DKR (≈ 1.600 USD ≈ 1.350 EUR). The unemployment benefit is a state supplemented unemployment insurance, with more generous transfers than social assistance and less harsh eligibility testing. The incapacity benefit is

awarded to recipients who are unable to work anymore, but who is not yet old enough to qualify for state pension. Access to this scheme is based on strict eligibility testing, but once entrance is gained the testing stops. The state pension is a minimum pension given to all citizens above the age of 65. This small public pension can be supplemented with a several means tested benefits, put in place to combat poverty, but the questions concerns the basic universal benefit. However, pensioners who have labor market pensions or private pensions are subject to reductions in their state pension, which is the case for many pensioners, resulting in them receiving little or none. The state education grant is given to all, above the age of 18, who are enrolled at an education institution. There are no means testing, other than a maximum amount you can earn before reductions are made in the grant.

To illustrate the support for each benefit the overall opinion balance of the benefit level has been calculated. Since the respondents had to answer whether the spending was too high, suitable, or too low this is a relative measure affected by the current benefits levels. The opinion balance was calculated by subtracting the percentage who answered "too low" from those how answered "too generous". This produces a number ranging from +100 (all respondents found the public benefit level too low) to -100 (all respondents found the benefit level too high). The "don't know" answers have not been included to give all categories the full range of variance and because the "suitable" category to some degree fills the same role.

RESULTS

Above three theoretical explanations are outlined. In addition a theory on the interplay between polity feedback from proximity and the public perception created by deservingness heuristics has been proposed. In the next section it will be explored how the three theories can be used in interpreting welfare attitudes and the outlined interplay is examined. Beginning with how the answers are distributed the overall opinion balances are presented in table 1:

Table 1: The opinion balances of benefit levels in percent

	Too generous	Suitable	Too low	Opinion balance. Percentage points difference	N
Social assistance	36	48	16	-20	897
Unemployment benefits	12	60	28	16	915
Incapacity benefits	13	60	27	14	801
State education grant	7	60	33	26	987
State pension	2	38	60	58	983

Examining table 1 the results show that for four of the five social benefits most respondents chose the "suitable" category, reflecting that they are satisfied with the current spending level on the social benefit. If we look at the overall opinion balance of each benefit there are, however, some notable variations between the social benefits. At the one end of the scale social assistance have by far the lowest opinion balance with a score of -20, reflecting an overall public desire to retrench the benefit. Next are incapacity benefits and unemployment benefits which have overall

scores of respectively 14 and 16, then the state education grand with a opinion balance of 26, and finally the state pension which enjoy a large support of 58 for more spending.

Self-interest

Using the theories outlined above the individual attitudes towards social benefits will now be examined, starting with self-interest. As discussed in the theory section self-interest is commonly measured as using personal income. The idea is that it gives a measure of how likely it is that a person benefits from the social benefits, since many social benefits function as income replacement or are targeted at low income groups.

Table 2: The opinion balances of benefit levels split by income groups 1-6

	Income groups								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	N (min):	Gamma	Gamma ÷ income group 1
Social assistance	-27	0	-13	-13	-21	-40	99	-0,10*	-0.18*
Unemployment benefits	2	19	20	25	19	5	89	0,01NS	-0.07*
Incapacity benefits	0	20	28	17	14	0	80	-0,05NS	-0.14*
State education grant	28	27	26	30	26	11	110	-0,07NS	-0.07*
State pension	33	73	69	65	53	42	93	-0,10*	-0.29*

Note: "*What is your annual income, before taxes, including pensions?*" Income groups: 1: 0 DDKR - 99.999 DKR, 2: 100.000 DKR -199.999 DKR, 3: 200.000 DKR - 299.999 DKR 4: 300.000 DKR - 399.999 DKR, 5: 400.000 DKR - 499.999 DKR, 6: 500.000 DKR - or above. NS= Non Significant, * = P>0.05, ** = P>0.01.

Table 2 shows that for most of the social benefits, personal income is a somewhat successful predictor of attitudes, at least when disregarding income group 1. This is reflected in the gamma scores, which are somewhat strong, at least when excluding income group 1. For the rest of the benefits there seems to be a relationship between low incomes and attitudes. Income group 1 behaves unexpectedly, in that their responses look much like the highest income group. This is most likely due to the group consisting mostly of students (56 % of the group receives state education grant). Keeping to a self-interest explanation their attitudes can be explained by the fact that students are blocked from receiving the other benefits and can expect to gain higher incomes within a short time span.

Social justice

The second theoretical explanation is social justice values, which is commonly measured using voting patterns, as an expression of a set of underling values regarding distribution the welfare state. Overall, this is a very strong explanation, in that for every social benefit the left-wing voters have a more positive assessment than the right-wing voters, and the difference is significant (at $p>0.01$) for all but the state pension. By far the biggest difference is on social assistance where the opinion balances are respectively 9 and -43. This difference in the assessments of social assistance cannot be attributed to higher proximity to recipients of social assistance by the left-wing voters (Gamma -0.06, not significant). This suggests that differences in attitudes are not just created by differences in proximity, but an expression of perceptions of social justice. For unemployment benefits, incapacity benefits, and the state education grant the

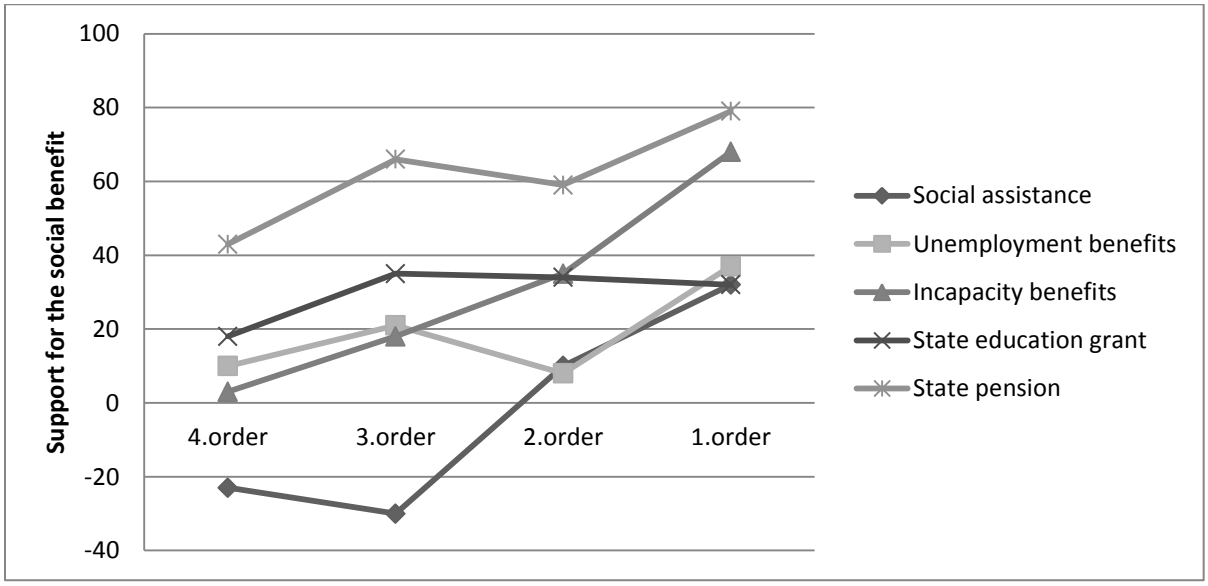
differences in the overall scores are between 24 and 27, and only for the state pension is the difference between right-wing and left-wing voters small (6 points of difference).

Interpreting the results though the deservingness criteria, as the other possible explanation of social justice norms, it is possible to explain, part of, the ranking of the social benefits (see table 1). In general, benefits targeted at groups not able to work have more positive opinion balances than benefits targeted at groups not able to work. This fits well with van Oorschot (2006) reporting that of the criteria "(…) *control seems to be most important, closely followed by identity.*" (Oorschot 2006, 26). However, going into details this explanation faces some problems. Similar to van Oorschot (2000; 2006) reporting the elderly as being perceived as the most deserving group and the unemployed the least, state pensions and social assistance fall at each end of the spectrum. This fits with the control criteria, since the elderly hardly can be blamed for being old and thus not able to work, while the unemployed should be able to work. The fact that unemployment benefits enjoy a more positive opinion balance than social assistance, even though both are tied to being unemployed, fits poorly with the deservingness explanation though. Similarly are the assessments of incapacity benefits hard to explain applying the deservingness criteria. The permanently sick and disabled, receiving incapacity benefits, are not able to work and thus should be more deserving than recipients of unemployment benefits. This should result in higher public support, yet there is almost no difference between incapacity benefits and unemployment benefit in terms of the opinion balances of the policies. The low score of incapacity benefits might be due to the recipients being in the working age, but it still stands out as a curious case. Students are not inculcated in van Oorschots (2000; 2006) ranking of deserving groups, but applying the deservingness criteria it is easy to imagine their relatively high score is due to students being blocked from fulltime work.

Policy feedback from proximity

The policy feedback from proximity will be shown in graph 2, in which the opinion balances of benefit levels split by proximity. Note that the orders of proximity have been arranged from low (4.order) to high (1.order) to imitate the expectations outlined in figure 1.

Graph 2: The opinion balances of benefit levels split by proximity



Note: Gamma: SA (-0.2*), UB (-0.17*), IB (-0.42**), SEG (-0.18*), SP (-0.31**). NS= Non Significant, * = P>0.05, ** = P>0.01. N (min) = SA (31), UB (118), IB (38), SEG (131), SP (149).

Overall graph 2 shows that for all five benefits there is a pattern of proximity influencing the attitudes, i.e. higher degrees of proximity leads to the respondents having more positive attitudes towards more spending. As discussed in the methods section proximity also an indicator of self-interest, because there is an economic gain from receiving (1.order) or someone in your family

(2.order) receiving a benefit. In this respect the 3.order proximity is interesting there is no direct economic gains from having friends receive a social benefit. The results for 3.order users are mixed, for social assistance the attitudes are almost identical with those who have no proximity. For the other benefits there is difference, suggesting that the effect of proximity is not entirely driven by self-interest. As expected the effect from proximity is not alike among the social benefits. This is reflected in the gamma coefficients, which ranging from -0.17 to -0.42 (all significant at $p>0.05$).

Drawing on the theoretical framework presented earlier it will be examined how the effect of proximity interacts with the perceived deservingness of the target group. In figure 1 two possible patterns for the influence of proximity were outlined.

Starting with social assistance, the social benefit with the lowest overall assessment (see table 1), the effect of proximity seems to be relatively strong, but only for 1.order and second 2.order. The fact that proximity has a strong effect on attitudes suggests the existence of negative stereotypes in the public (Larsen and Dejgaard 2012; Soss and Schram 2007). These negative images are then for the groups with high proximity, in this case 1.order and 2.order, challenged by personal experiences with recipients. The negative public images of the recipients of social assistance and incapacity benefits might be furthered by the fact that only a low percentage of the recipients have some degree of proximity (1.-3.order compared to 4.order). For social assistance and incapacity benefits it respectively 19 and 32 percent compared to 66 percent for state pension, 47 percent for state education grant and 41 percent for unemployment benefits. The differences in overall proximity in the population might also offer an additional explanation to why universal

benefits have bigger overall support. Unemployment benefits do to some degree fit the proposed pattern for an undeserving group, but also display an "outlier", in that the respondents with close family receiving unemployment benefits (2.order) are actually less willing to spend more on the benefit than any of the other groups. Incapacity benefits display a very linear relationship along the order of proximity. This linear relationship coupled with the fact that the benefit has a low overall assessment suggests that this is not the case, and like for social assistance negative public images exist of this group. These negative attitudes towards the benefits might be explained by the fact that the benefit has been the subject of much critique and the group of recipients is in the working age. The state education grant display little effect from proximity, which fits very well with the predictions for a benefit targeted at a deserving group. Finally the state pension display a pattern that falls in-between the two ideal types. This might be the biggest challenge to the proposed interaction between proximity and deservingness. One possible explanation of this unexpected pattern is a national debate on the retirement age and whether many the recipients are actually able to work.

Controlled effects

After showing that it is plausible that the theories have some explanatory power, but also some shortcomings, they will be tested in a regressions model. Using OLS-regressions the explanatory power of each independent variable (ideology, personal income, and proximity) will be tested, controlling for the other variables. The dependent variable is still the assessments of the benefits with the possible answers being too generous (1), suitable (2), or too low (3). The "don't know" answers on the dependent variable have not been included. The hypothesis in each regression is

structured in the same way, in that lower values on the independent variables, should result in higher scores on the assessments of the benefits. Interpreting the regressions this means that having left-wing voting preferences, having a low personal income, or being proximate to the benefit should result in a higher score in more positive assessments of the benefits and therefore negative regressions. The regressions should show similar results to those above, but the standardized regression coefficients enables comparing the effects.

Table 4: The connection between ideology, personal income, and proximity and the assessment of social benefits. OLS-regressions presented as bivariate regressions, controlled for other variables

	Social assistance	Unemployment benefits	Incapacity benefits	State Education Grant	State pension
Ideology	-0.35**	-0.22**	-0.21**	-0.21**	-0.04ns
Personal Income[1]	-0.08*	-0.08*	-0.04ns	-0.06ns	-0.19**
Proximity	-0.17**	-0.09*	-0.27**	-0.12**	-0.10*
Adjusted R^2	0.16**	0.06**	0.12**	0.07**	0.05**
N-min	655	812	589	702	729

Notes: NS= Non Significant, * = P>0.05, ** = P>0.01.

[1] Income group 1 has been omitted from this variable, due the problems outlined above.

Overall, table 4 shows that for the five social benefits all three theoretical explanations are useful in explaining what motivates attitudes to social benefits. The explanatory power of each

explanation does, however, vary between the social benefits. Going into specifics social justice norms, as measured by left-right voting patterns, is the strongest predictor of the assessments for three of the five benefits and only in regards to state pension is it not significant. This shows, that like with the overall welfare attitudes, left-right ideology is important for individual attitudes, even when controlling for personal income and proximity to the social benefits. Personal income, as the proxy for self-interest, is a significant predictor for three of the five benefits, but the effect is relatively weak for social assistance and unemployment benefits, even when omitting income group 1. The proximity measure, as a proxy for policy feedback, is significant predictor of attitudes for all five social benefits and even the strongest for incapacity benefits. This indicates that being proximate to social benefits affects attitudes, but also that this effect varies among the social benefits.

CONCLUSION

The paper shows that individual welfare attitudes to social benefits can be explained using a combination of self-interest, social justice norms, and feedback from the policies. This is not a new or surprising conclusion. Most of the papers on welfare attitudes cited above do to some degree reach the same conclusion: That the theories are complementary and not competing, though the policy feedback explanation is less represented, simply because this way of describing welfare attitudes is less developed. This paper does, however, contribute with three new parts to the puzzle of welfare attitudes. First it uses the explanations in different policy areas and in a comparable way, showing that for different social benefits different explanations come into play. Secondly it a uses different dependent and independent variable than most of the other

papers referenced above based on a discussion of the methodical problems in this field. The welfare attitudes were measured at a policy level, due to the fact that general welfare state measures of attitudes tap into too ideologically-laden measures, which potentially could blur out other explanations. This does, however, create some limitations for the conclusions, since the results are not directly applicable in other institutional setting or even over time. However, since the results resemble those of other studies it could indicate that the "mechanisms" that Svallfors (2010) called for seems to be more universal. Regarding the independent variables a question on proximity to the social benefit were used as a measurement of both policy feedback and as self-interest. Here it was argued that since the effect from proximity goes beyond even broad definitions of self-interest, both explanations are useful in explaining welfare attitudes. Thirdly, the paper contributes with is a theoretical proposal regarding the interaction between the policy feedback from proximity and the opinion balance of the policies, created by deservingness heuristics. The hypothesis was that the effect of being proximate to be bigger when the group of recipients is publicly deemed undeserving. The results did however only in part confirm the proposed interaction.

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